



## COUNTRY PROFILE



A square in Old Havana; USAID's Cuba program promotes self-determined democracy in Cuba.

### OVERVIEW

Fifty years after the revolution, Cuba today remains one of the most politically repressed countries in the world. Current Cuban law and practice prevent the right to assemble without the permission of the state, criminalize dissemination of information contrary to the official line, and provide a state monopoly over mass media. The



The Castro regime currently holds more than 200 political prisoners. The Heritage Foundation's 2008 Index of Economic Freedom ranks Cuba 156 out of 157 countries—just above North Korea. Cuba is the only non-democratically-elected government in the Western Hemisphere.

The Cuban people are laying the foundation for a democratic Cuba. Even before Raul Castro officially replaced his brother as President in 2008, Cuba's independent civil society movement was becoming increasingly vibrant and vocal. A recent survey on the island found that 63 percent of Cubans want freedom of expression and the ability to choose their leaders. More than 86 percent want the right to own their own property and businesses. Yet civil society groups in Cuba remain severely challenged. They often lack the institutional capacity and access to relevant information to achieve their goals. Due to the Government of Cuba's historical control over all Cuban institutions, most citizens have a limited understanding of democracy and free-market economics.

### PROGRAMS

#### DEMOCRACY

To promote a peaceful transition to self-determined democracy on the island, USAID has supported a non-presence democracy program for Cuba since 1996. USAID's Cuba Program falls under the Governing Justly and Democratically objective in the foreign assistance framework. To support the U.S. foreign assistance objectives, USAID:

- Provides humanitarian assistance to political prisoners, their families and other victims of repression.
- Advances human rights through training and material support for human rights groups and campaigns. USAID also supports monitoring and documentation of human rights violations in Cuba.
- Strengthens independent civil society organizations and grassroots participation in community development initiatives.

#### CUBA SNAPSHOT

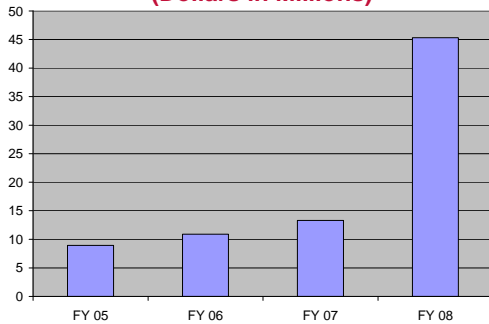
Date of independence: 1902  
Population: 11.451 million  
GDP (PPP): \$108.2 billion  
GDP per capita (PPP): \$9,500

Source: CIA, *The World Factbook*



## COUNTRY PROFILE CONTINUED

**USAID Assistance to the Cuba Program  
(Dollars in Millions)**



- Weakens the information blockade by supporting information sharing into and out of Cuba. USAID also provides voice to Cuban independent journalists.
- Advances political competition in Cuba by supporting the nascent pro-democracy movement to create space for dialogue about democratic change and reconciliation.

USAID employs the following cross-cutting program approaches:

### **SOCIAL CAPITAL AND NETWORKS**

Social capital and a culture of participation are required to support democratic institutions and practices. Further, research indicates that the democratic transitions can be heavily influenced by the quality of social networks which hold reform movements together through inevitable challenges. Recognizing that network promotion is a medium- to long-term endeavor, USAID encourages this process in Cuba by providing incentives for inter-group collaboration.

### **TECHNOLOGY AND NEW MEDIA**

New Media—defined as a convergence of universal and interconnected media, such as audio, video and electronic text—is a low cost way of increasing the volume and speed of communication among social networks. USAID supports the achievement of all aspects of its Cuba strategy by providing an enabling environment for New Media through the provision of equipment and training in information communication and technology.

### **INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY**

USAID supports the development of effective relationships between independent Cuban actors and individuals and institutions in the Western Hemisphere and Europe which are committed to democracy. Such relationships allow Cuban partners to learn lessons from democratic transitions in eastern Europe and other countries.

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